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THE SIN OF WASTEFULNESS,

A S E R M O N

PREACHED AT THE
PARISH CHURCH

OF

ST. VEDAST FOSTER,

ON JANUARY 17, 1796,

AFTER READING THE LETTER OF THE
ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY, &c.
RECOMMENDING A REDUCTION IN
THE CONSUMPTION OF WHEAT.

By WILLIAM AGUTTER, A.M.

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JOHN VI. 12.

GATHER UP THE FRAGMENTS THAT REMAIN;
THAT NOTHING BE LOST.

HE who is the Giver of all Good, who *openeth his hand, and filleth all things living with plenteousness*, can never approve of waste; for it implies a disregard of his bounty, a forgetfulness of our daily dependence and numerous obligations to Him.

The Lord in the days of his flesh fed five thousand with five barley loaves and two small fishes. He pronounced the blessing, and his blessing produced abundance. In his divine hands the loaves and fishes multiplied. The *great company* partook of the fruits of immediate creation. There was bread enough and to spare, and yet the divine Giver adds, *Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost.*

This command is always important, but it may be more necessary at some periods, particularly when we are threatened with scarcity. Then the duty is urgent ; gather up the fragments that remain. Husband them to the best advantage. Deal them out sparingly, that they may last the longer time. Here true policy and true religion go hand in hand. The love of our country, and the regard to God and man suggest the same line of conduct in such emergencies, quietly to acquiesce under the afflictive dispensation, and to lessen the calamity by all the means in our power.

He who giveth, likewise withholdeth. *The times and the seasons*, the winds and the rains, are *in His hands*. Man may exert his utmost powers, and yet not secure himself from want. He has no creative powers. He may till the ground, and sow the seed ; he must *wait for the early and latter rain* ; but all his labour will be in vain, all his hopes perish, unless God *giveth the increase*.

Scarcity, then, is an afflictive dispensation of God, sent to humble the pride, to cure the luxury, or to point out the danger of

of individuals or nations. It is a severe but kind discipline, calculated to correct, to punish and amend : to rouse them to the sense of their duty, and the acknowledgment of their dependance : therefore to repine against, to resist such dispensations, is really to quarrel with Providence, and to fight against God. Discontent increases the evils under which we suffer, whilst it deprives us of the means of making them less. *In vain do the potsherds of the earth strive with their Maker.* Are we stronger than He? But by meek submission, by seeing the rod, and who has appointed, we learn to bear it as Christians, and to derive spiritual benefits from temporal calamities.

Let us then consider, particularly at this time, the great sin of Wastefulness, and the various ways in which it is practised.

Waste proceeds from ignorance, ingratitude and unthankfulness, from luxury, and want of compassion. Man could not waste the bounties of Heaven, if he considered his obligations to God, or the various wants and necessities of his fellow creatures. He who wastes, forgets that he is a dependent

and accountable servant, and seems only willing to live for himself, to pamper his appetite, to indulge his ease, and to think no more of others.

The more we indulge, the more indulgence we require : he who fares sumptuously every day, will be but ill able to relinquish his needless abundance, and to enjoy the comfort of plainer food.

Nature is soon satisfied ; the real purposes of health, strength and activity do not require much. He, then, who eats more than is requisite for these purposes, is guilty of waste. He heedlessly consumes what does himself no good, and what many really want. The table of luxury, and the costly variety of unnecessary food, is a strong temptation to exceed the bounds of rational temperance. By being habitually replenished, the springs of life are impeded, the seeds of diseases are nourished, the humours become gross : man enjoys himself less, and is less useful in the world.

The purposes of our well being are best answered by plain and simple food [A] : they, then, are guilty of waste who refine
on

on the arts of luxury, and who destroy much wholesome meat by reducing it to a very small compass to please their vitiated palate, and to instigate their languid appetite.

The rites of hospitality and society will always require a due attention to our friends; yet in times of scarcity there can be no excuse for providing a needless abundance; a superfluity of diet, a rich variety of dainties, become a waste. All second courses partake so much of luxury, parade and indulgence, that they are never necessary, and at such times ought to be omitted. When servants observe an unnecessary profusion at your table, it is a great temptation to them to consume more than is requisite. You cannot expect that they should be careful, where you are extravagant. It would be well, where the masters are rationally frugal, if the servants would follow their example.

In times of general or particular scarcity, it is necessary to omit some articles of food which may neither be luxurious or extravagant in themselves, but which would consume too much of the article most wanted;

in which case it is wise and patriotic to restrain where we can; and to be moderate and very temperate, where we cannot altogether restrain. This, indeed, may be the more difficult in the case of plain and common food which has been in very general use, but necessity absolutely demands it: wisdom and piety will easily make the sacrifice, which habit soon reconciles, and conscience will approve.

Domestic animals require a proper support, yet care must be taken that in feeding them we do not diminish or waste that food which would support our fellow creatures; if so, we are guilty of waste in giving to the brute beast what might be justly demanded for the comfort or the wants of mankind [B].

All who have it in their power, should endeavour to prevent waste. The inattention of some heads of families does much mischief. Servants are left too much to themselves: abuses creep in by degrees: when they are firmly established, they can hardly be removed. No one should be above looking into their own affairs; for if they

they are bound to prevent wastefulness themselves, they are also bound to prevent it in others to the best of their power. A regular superintendence over domestic œconomy, and an attention to cleanliness in every department, will be found the best means to prevent increasing waste, and to correct it where it is introduced.

• Servants, as men and as Christians, are not only generally concerned in the above remarks, but there are some particulars more immediately applicable to them.

They should have the same care of their master's property as they would have of their own; they must do as they would be done unto. In them all luxury, excess and waste is a species of dishonesty, a sort of daily robbery. They may easily learn what the family they live with is pleased to allow, and all that they assume beyond this is certainly wrong. The situation, the age, the fortune and family of their masters and mistresses may debar the servants of some indulgencies which others enjoy, may prudently deprive them of company, or allow them to give but little provision away. It

is your duty in these particulars strictly to conform. It is but a poor plea for charity, very falsely so called, which is to be exerted by an act of disobedience. Beggars may be fed, or your acquaintance indulged; you may be flattered as generous, but at the expence of your master's property, and the risque of his displeasure.

In vain do you urge that "he is rich, that he can well afford it, or that he will never find it out." It may be so; but concealment implies criminality: he alone is the best judge of what he can really afford. You cannot know his income, and what are the various claims, if not the just demands upon him from relations, friends, and charities. You have no right to be the almoner of his benevolence, unless he has commissioned you so to do. Under the poor semblance of a virtue, you are doing what is wrong; you are indulging a thoughtless excess, a prodigal waste. You feed indolence, and call it charity; you pamper luxury, and call it friendship.

Every vice brings its own punishment with it. Every step in sin is a step in sorrow.

row. He who wastes must probably be reduced to want ; when calamity is come upon him as an armed man, when he begins to be in want, how bitterly will he lament the days of his prosperity, how severely will he feel the consequences of his folly ; what would he then give for those meals which he has eaten in waste, for those provisions which were consumed only to indulge his appetite, and to deprave his nature. The more luxuriously we live, the less shall we be able to struggle with misfortunes, *to endure hardships as good soldiers of Jesus Christ*. Indulgence enervates both body and soul ; and when this is the case, affliction falls on us with a double weight.

The conduct which may be absolutely necessary at one time, is a matter of indifference or of choice at another. In general, kindness will prompt us to distribute bread in abundance ; but the same kindness, guided by wisdom, will now direct us to be sparing of it, and to deal it out to the best advantage. At the same time the current of our bounty will not stop ; we shall feel for the hardships of the labouring
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poor,

poor, and be happy in supplying them with various substitutes instead of bread.

To prevent mischief is the highest wisdom to man, is the best use of his rational powers; nay, some animals seem to have a sort of wise forethought, and make provision against the time to come.

You have heard from the first authority that there is a scarcity of bread-corn [c]; if, then, means are not used to reduce the consumption of it considerably before we can gather the fruits of the earth in the next harvest, this scarcity may produce a famine of bread, and a famine of bread must enhance all the necessaries of life; the cry then will be, "Who would have thought it, and I wish I had retrenched in time." A wise and good man will do that from choice, which another may be compelled to do from necessity; he will be thankful for what he has, rather than repine at what he has given up [d].

If we refuse to follow the example, or to comply with the recommendation of our superiors in this time of need, it will abundantly prove that, we have lost all sense of virtue

virtue by the love of sensuality ; all care of the future in the indulgence of the present moment ; all love of your country, by increasing it's calamity and danger ; all true charity for man, by not easing his affliction when you have it in your power ; all regard to your God and Saviour, by wantonly augmenting his providential dispensation.

If by a continuance of inclement seasons ; if by a thoughtless excess and practical epicurism, which says, " Let me feast to-day, if I starve to-morrow : I will not restrain more than others : I will indulge in white bread, and fine wheaten bread while it is to be procured."—If instead of being humbled and amended by the divine judgment, we become indifferent, hard-hearted and head-strong, then it is more than probable, that our *calamity* may be of *long continuance*, the *SCARCITY* may be converted into *FAMINE*.

Shall I dwell on the misery of such a situation only to instigate you to use all the means in your power to prevent it ? When a famine is *fore* in the land, then high and low, the prince and the peasant suffer together. Riches are no defence, rank is no

protection. The strength of a kingdom becomes its burden. The means of social comforts only open so many new avenues of distress to the feeling mind. Man's wants are daily ; and the scanty supply of bad provisions scarce answer the demands of nature. Hospitality and cheerfulness are banished from the table : the hand of charity is stopt, while the necessities of the poor, the aged and the afflicted rapidly increase. Hunger rouses and sharpens the angry passions. Such periods have been always marked by the additional calamity of robbers, formidable from their numbers and their cruelty.

At this time in particular we should have more to apprehend : the desperately factious and ambitious would take advantage of the national distress, would encourage the general ill humour, and attempt to cast all the blame on government [E].

Hear how the Prophet bewails such an affliction. *The precious sons of Zion, comparable to fine gold, how are they esteemed as earthen pitchers, the work of the hands of the potter. Even the sea-monsters draw out the breast, they give suck to their young ones, but the daughter*

daughter of my people is become like the ostrich in the wilderness. The tongue of the sucking child cleaveth to the roof of his mouth for thirst; the young children ask bread, and no man breaketh it unto them: the children and the sucklings swoon in the gates of the city. They say to their mothers, where is corn and wine? when they swooned as the wounded in the streets of the city, when their soul was poured out into their mother's bosom. They that did feed delicately are desolate, they that were brought up in scarlet embrace dunghills. They that be slain with the sword, are better than they that be slain with hunger, for these pine away, being stricken through for want of the fruit of the field. Pestilence follows after, and afflicts the remainder whom famine has spared.

These are the fore judgments of the Almighty on guilty nations; these are the natural consequences of luxury and transgressions. Power belongeth unto God. In his hands the weakest instruments become formidable. He calleth for the blast, the mildew, the caterpillar and the fly, and they obey Him. *A fruitful land maketh He barren for the wickedness of them that dwell therein.*

therein. When God strikes, man must feel; and if he has a true regard for himself, will repent and amend.

May then the desolations of famine and pestilence never visit us: may we be preserved in peace, and again be blessed with plenty: if we have seen the gathering storm, and the rod uplifted, let us turn unto God, while yet it is the acceptable time. Let us beware how we provoke Him, lest He should *take away the whole staff of bread*, and make us *sick with famine*, and then leave us in the hands of our own councils, to reap that misery which always is produced by folly and impiety.

Let us also retrench in the consumption of wheat as much as we can. Let every master of a family set the example himself, and explain the necessity of this reduction to those of his household. *There are yet many months before the harvest comes*: the crops of the two last years were not large, and the granaries of Europe were exhausted. A large part of the produce of last year is returned to the earth again as seed corn, with the hopes of abundance. All these things

things prove the absolute necessity of considerable reductions, that we may weather this storm, that we may eke out the remainder of our provision, and thus it may last us until *the appointed weeks of the harvest*.

Let, then, the love of CHRIST constrain us to make this reasonable sacrifice to the general welfare of our country; to the relief of the poor and the distressed. *Whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.* Whatever your station in life may be, you know that it is your bounden duty to prevent all the mischief, to do all the good, you possibly can.

Do not say that this is a mere trifle, that you are only one among millions, and therefore it may be safely disregarded. The good effect to be expected is from the union and the perseverance of numbers. Every day much may be saved, therefore every day the means of tranquillity and comfort are secured.

Perhaps you may be offended with some who either have broken a solemn engagement, or who will put no restraint on their luxury and excess; but *follow not a multitude*

to do evil. Be thou faithful in that which is little. If we are guided by the wisdom of eternity, we shall make a conscience of the whole of our conduct, and we shall have no reason to be ashamed of our choice.

Let us then receive the friendly warning, and learn to grow in heavenly wisdom by repenting wherever we have done wrong; by living in a state of constant dependance on God; by practising a daily self-denial on Christian principles; by adoring the Great Giver, while we receive his gifts; by making our sacrifices of temperance administer to the necessities of others. From temporal calamities we may derive spiritual improvement. The affliction which distresses the body, may purify and elevate the soul. However it may appear to the eye of sense while suffering under the chastising rod, yet if this we are certain, that there is a superabounding good designed, in the divine intent. Every judgment is directed by mercy. *Thy loving corrections have made me great. Behold, then, happy is the man, happy is the nation whom God correcteth, therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty :*

*mighty: for He maketh sore, and bindeth up;
 He woundeth, and his bands make whole: He
 shall deliver thee in six troubles, yea in seven
 there shall no evil touch thee. In FAMINE He
 shall redeem thee from death, and in war, from
 the power of the sword.*

APPEND.

A P P E N D I X.

[A] THE objections urged against mixed Bread, seem to proceed from ignorance on the subject, or a false benevolence. It is a certain fact, that the most numerous and laborious parts of the community in England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland, principally subsist on barley, or oats, or potatoes.

[B] The number of horses kept of late years may be considered as an increasing evil. They consume much of the produce of the ground. Oxen would answer all the purposes of hard labour and agriculture; they consume much less, and are useful for man's subsistence when their labour is over. The late tax on working horses will prove a national benefit, if their number should lessen, and their place be supplied in the plough and the team by oxen.—Men of distinguished rank and fortune may have expensive amusements, but when we hear
of

of some thousands every year being spent on one pack of dogs, it is but natural to suspect that there must be much waste of food ; and surely we may lament when such a sum of money, if judiciously directed, might find employment, and thus bestow comforts on numerous poor families.

[c] See the order of the Privy Council, the Letter of the Archbishop of Canterbury, and the unanimous Resolutions of both Houses of Parliament.—Extracts from his Grace's Letter. " From enquiries prosecuted in every possible way, and from the most solemn and laborious investigation of the subject, there is too much reason to believe, that the crops of wheat in the two lay years, have fallen far short of what is called the medium. No means have been left untried, no exertions spared, to make good the deficiency by importation. But the general failure of the crops, both on the continent of Europe, and in America, makes it impossible to obtain an adequate supply. Such is the real state of the case, which it can answer no good purpose to disguise. And the inevitable consequence must

must be, if the consumption of wheat goes on at the usual rate, that the whole stock of the kingdom will be exhausted long before the next harvest can be gathered in, or be even ripe for gathering.

“ To prevent a calamity so much to be dreaded, there seems to be no resource or remedy by any human means, but in a reduction of the ordinary consumption of wheat by all families and individuals in the higher and middle classes of life. By such a reduction a larger quantity will be left for the use of the indigent and laborious classes, who have not the means of procuring for themselves other kinds of sustenance. And to so small a sacrifice of what may well be spared, in favour and for the aid of those who cannot be deprived of it without extreme distress, what motive can be wanting? It will be praise-worthy in every view of morality, policy, and Christian charity, and it will recommend us to the favour and protection of Almighty God, the creator and preserver of men, who alone can restore to us the blessings of peace.”

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[D] I find it the general wish of all I have conversed with, that a Law should pass, only allowing mixed Bread to be made with two thirds of wheat flour. While a finer sort is to be procured, some from obstinacy or luxury will obtain it. Necessity would justify the measure; which is particularly recommended to Parliament by the Common Council of the City of London.

[E] See the account of a very dreadful storm in France, July 13th, 1788. It produced a local scarcity, and this considerably added to the embarrassments of Government.—Annual Register for 1789, Vol. xxxi. p. 29—31.

F I N I S.

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